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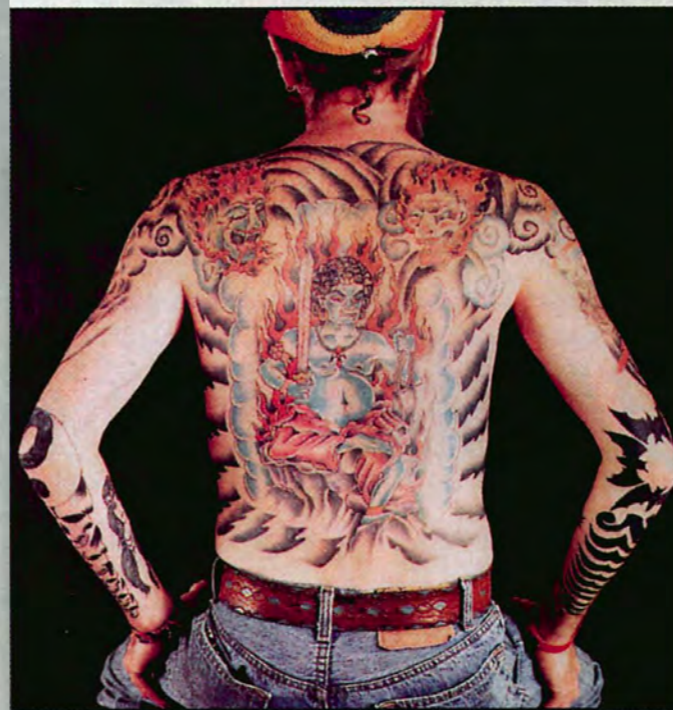


FLESH AS CANVAS

A photographer's view

BY MARKUS CUFF

What happens when a Midwest born-and-bred art photographer known for his extra large format images turns his curious eye to the tattoo scene? We found out December 10 when Illinois shooter Douglas Busch inaugurated his West Coast studio with a *Flesh As Canvas* celebration in Culver City, California. Huge color prints and smaller computer enhanced detail images covered the walls in one of the large airy, high-ceilinged rooms at the complex.



All the people pictured at the gallery were photographed in a studio setting with the background dropping off into darkness. The subjects came from a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles, and the show was punctuated by a selection of full nudes, some clutching or obscuring private areas, some nqt. Many of the computer assisted prints featured contorted female torsos-ripples of brightly colored flesh bent or positioned so as to defy easy identification.

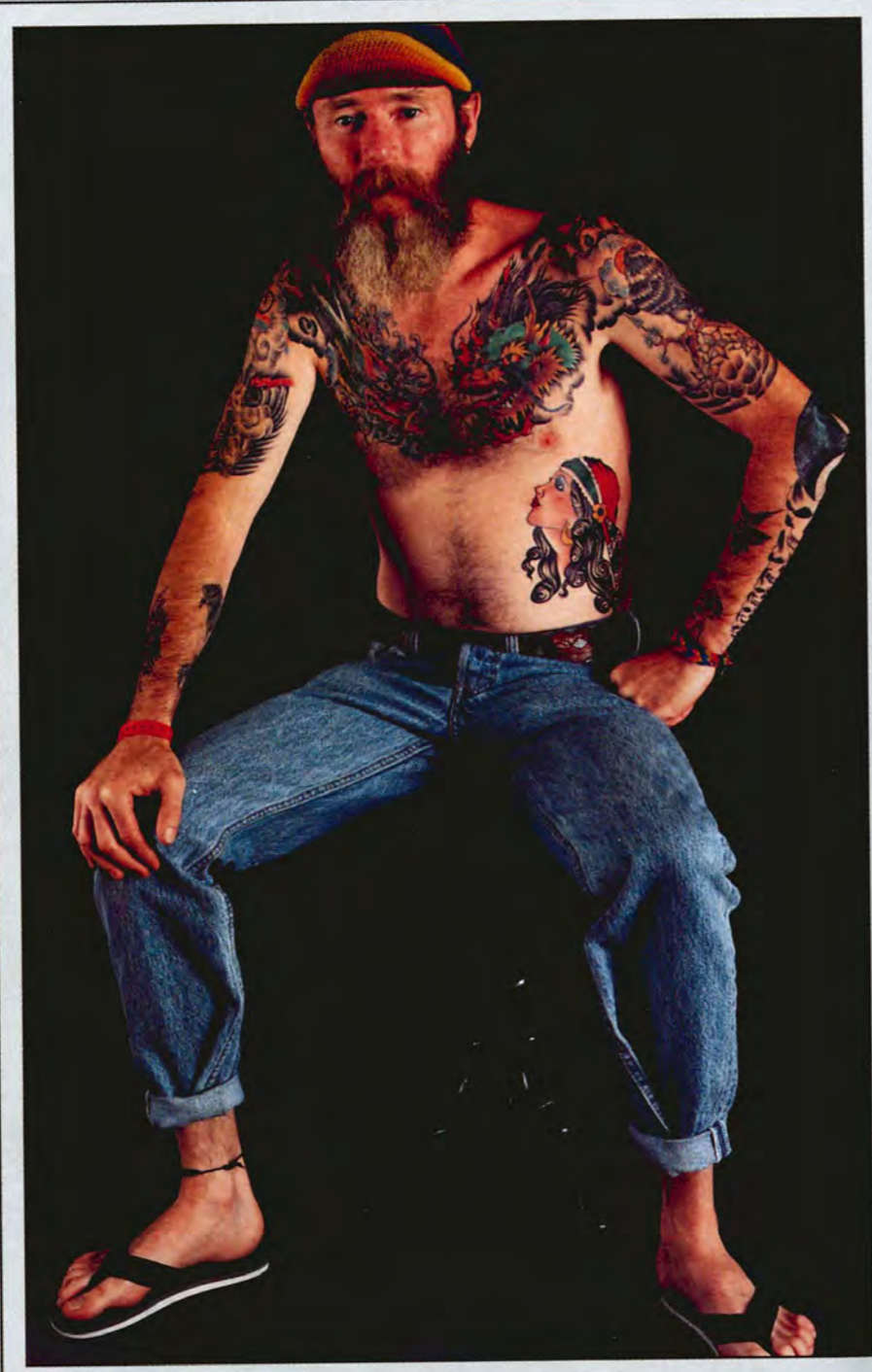
Presented by L.A. gallery owner Earl McGrath, the show drew a largely →





un-tattooed crowd who seemed to have been drawn out of curiosity and perhaps through the pull of McGrath's no-doubt ample mailing list. Fresh young couples mingled with matrons in leopard print and fur. New York models, art critics, and various movie industry types made the rounds, admired the art, and schmoozed.

The move to color images of people contrasts sharply with Busch's reputation as a strictly black-and-white architectural and nature photographer. It's quite a stretch from the subtle shades of Busch's masterful prints of places

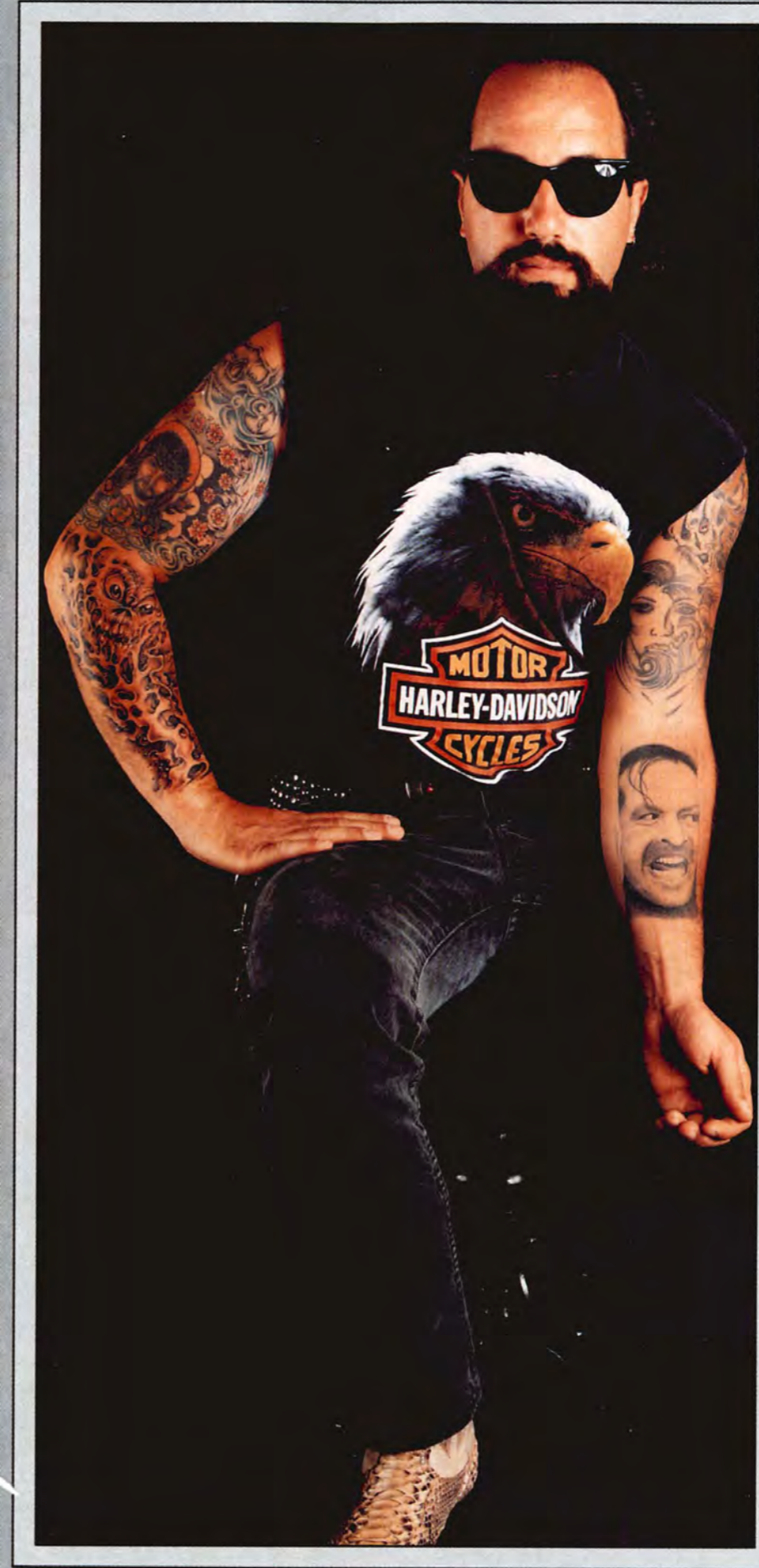


like Monument Valley and Dead Horse Point, Utah, to the in-your-face high contrast prints of tattooed people. (In one full length print of a biker, you could easily miss his two little Chihuahuas, one black, one tan, peeking out at the viewer from their temporary homes in the side pocket pouches inside the guys conchoed leather vest.)

Busch got started on all this when a tattoo parlor moved in across the street from his old studio in Illinois. The neighbors were not impressed, in fact they prophesied doom and decay. Busch got his feathers ruffled over this knee-



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARKUS CLIFF & DOUGLAS BUSCH



jerk reaction and went to the shop and introduced himself. He liked what he saw and afterwards pitched Kodak with the idea to expose the scene. Two thousand portraits, thousands of detail shots, and at least one year later he has produced the images that will comprise an upcoming book—*Flesh As Canvas: Museum Without Walls*—which will incorporate one hundred 14 x 12 inch color plates.

And, yes, Busch's new group of friends provided the perfect backdrop for one of L.A.'s more intriguing pre-holiday parties. **TATTOO**